

# Complaints Handling Procedure Annual Summary 2016-17

## **Contents**

1. Performance Indicators
2. Complaints by Category
3. Themes and Improvements
4. Lessons Learned
5. Customer Satisfaction
6. Conclusions

Published: October 2017

## 1. Performance Indicators

<b>Total number of complaints received and complaints received per 100 population</b>		
Number of complaints received	169	
Number of complaints received per 100 population as a %	1.4%	
<b>Number of complaints closed at each stage and as a % of complaints closed</b>		
Number of complaints closed at Stage 1 and % of total closed	144	85.2%
Number of complaints closed at Stage 2 and % of total closed	11	6.5%
Number of complaints closed after Escalation and % of total closed	14	8.3%
<b>Number of complaints upheld and not upheld at each stage and as a % at each stage</b>		
<b>Stage 1</b>		
Number and % of complaints upheld at Stage 1	102	70.8%
Number and % of complaints not upheld at Stage 1	42	29.2%
<b>Stage 2</b>		
Number and % of complaints upheld at Stage 2	2	18.2%
Number and % of complaints not upheld at Stage 2	9	81.8%
<b>Escalated</b>		
Number and % of complaints upheld after Escalation	2	14.3%
Number and % of complaints not upheld after Escalation	12	85.7%
<b>Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at each stage</b>		
Total working days / ave. time in working days to close complaints at Stage 1	573	4.0
Total working days / ave. time in working days to close complaints at Stage 2	173	15.7
Total working days / ave. time in working days to close complaints after escalation	178	12.7
<b>Number and % of complaints closed within set timescales</b>		
Number and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 5 working days	120	83.3%
Number and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed with 5 working days	24	16.7%
Number and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 20 working days	9	81.8%
Number and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 20 working days	2	18.2%
Number and % of Escalated complaints closed within 20 working days	13	92.9%
Number and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 20 working days	1	7.1%
<b>Number and % of complaints closed at each stage where extensions have been authorised</b>		
Number and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 10 working days (ext.)	22	91.7%
Number and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed within 10 working days (ext.)	2	8.3%
Number and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 40 working days (ext.)	1	50.0%
Number and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 40 working days (ext.)	1	50.0%
Number and % of Escalated complaints closed within 40 working days (ext.)	0	0.0%
Number and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 40 working days (ext.)	1	100.0%

## 1. Performance Indicators continued

Overall there were 169 complaints handled during the period 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017, making the average number of complaints per month 14.1. This compares with 153 complaints handled in 2015-16, demonstrating slightly more expressions of dissatisfaction this academic year. It is however worth noting that there were 36 complaints this year as a result of a period of lecturing staff industrial action, which is a high number of complaints arising from an exceptional circumstance.

Of the 169 complaints received, 144 (85.2%) were dealt with at Stage 1, which is an increase on 74.5% dealt with at this stage in 2015-16. Of the 144 Stage 1 complaints, 70.8% were upheld, showing a significant increase on the 42.1% upheld last academic year (although it is worth noting that all 36 industrial action complaints were upheld). This year, the average time taken to respond at Stage 1 was 4.0 days, which is below the 5 days requested by SPSO, and is an improvement on the average 4.7 days of 2015-16.

The remaining 25 complaints (14.8%) were dealt with at Stage 2; 14 of these having been escalated from Stage 1. Of the 25 complaints, 16% were upheld which is a significant decrease on the 48.7% upheld during last academic year. The overall average time taken to respond to Stage 2 complaints was 14.0 days, which is below the 20 day SPSO target and a fair improvement on the average 20.2 days of 2015-16.

There has been an improvement in the number of complaints being answered without requirement for extension, with 25 requests for extension this academic year compared with 43 in 2015-16. That said, three complaints (12%) were still closed out beyond extension limits.

## 2. Complaints by Category

A breakdown of complaints received in each main category is shown below, in comparison with 2015-16:

Category	Complaints		Upheld		Not Upheld	
	16-17	15-16	16-17	15-16	16-17	15-16
Customer Care	59	49	30	24	29	25
Applications, Admission and Progression	18	34	7	10	11	24
Course Related	38	43	24	24	14	19
Services	6	10	1	2	5	8
Facilities	11	8	8	7	3	1
Others	*37	9	36	0	1	9
	<b>169</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>86</b>

\*36 complaints upheld in the 'Others' category related to teaching staff industrial action.

### 3. Themes and Improvements

#### Customer Care

A number of 'Staff Conduct' complaints arose as a result of staff either not meeting the required level of customer service, communicating poorly or failing to act appropriately upon a student request. In each case, it was established that staff could have handled the situation more considerately and in all cases an apology was provided and appropriate action was taken to resolve the problem highlighted. It was identified that in some instances, there was a requirement for customer service training, which was offered.

Almost all 'Student Conduct' complaints were received from College neighbours complaining about student lack of respect for the local community e.g. littering, smoking, inconsiderate parking, engine idling and speeding in local streets. As a result, the College worked in partnership with Glasgow City Council Community Wardens to reinforce student responsibility. In addition, the Student Association initiated a 'Respect your Local Community' campaign which aimed to highlight the importance of social responsibility and issues that impact upon the community. One student conduct complaint concerned student bullying, and following investigation, individuals were formally disciplined under the Student Discipline Procedure.

Further 'Customer Care' complaints were received from neighbours, as a result of inconsiderate parking by bus drivers collecting school students from the College on behalf of the local authority. Action was taken by both the local authority and the bus company to highlight this issue to all drivers, and request that they respect the neighbours of Glasgow Clyde College, whilst picking up school pupils.

#### Applications, Admission and Progression

There were a few complaints upheld in the 'Applications, Admission and Progression' category as a result of decisions made not to allow students to progress. In each case the student was offered either a place on their preferred course, or on another more appropriate programme. In one case it was established that reasonable adjustments had not been made for the applicant during the admissions process, and following identification of this issue, staff within the department were provided with training on reasonable adjustments and how to maintain effective guidance records.

A couple of complaints arose as a result of courses remaining advertised on the College website, despite all available places being accepted by other applicants. It was established that poor internal communications had led to the courses not being closed in a timely manner on the College website. Departments involved were reminded of the accepted procedure for closing applications on the College website.

One complainant was unhappy with lack of clarity regarding entry requirements for a course on the College website, and it was acknowledged that the information available did not provide enough specific detail. The website was updated to ensure clarity for all future applicants.

One complainant was unhappy with the differing entry criteria for the same course at two of the Glasgow Clyde College campuses, and as a result the entry criteria for future applicants was quickly standardised to ensure consistency and fairness.

## Course Related

Several complaints upheld in the 'Course Related' category related to network issues impacting learning, specifically for Computing students. This was thoroughly investigated and the issue was eventually traced to a server. It was believed that work carried out had rectified the problem, however further concerns were reported, which resulted in the upgrading and replacing of some firewalls. The reported instances of network dropouts decreased significantly following this fix.

A significant number of complaints upheld in this category resulted from the removal of essential resources from a workshop, three weeks prior to the end of a practical course. It was established that the classroom had been 'cleared up' and larger pieces of machinery removed by accident. As soon as the error was discovered, arrangements were made to urgently reinstate required machinery and complainants were offered a partial refund.

A couple of complaints upheld in this category resulted from a delay in certification because of the late addition of a mandatory unit to the awarding body framework. The College worked with SQA to ensure that the unit was added to the framework urgently, thus enabling full certification. Staff involved with the delivery of the qualification were instructed to check frameworks at commencement of study, so that they are able to intervene earlier, should there be an issue with a unit or an award. Another certification complaint was found to be due to an administrative error, which was quickly rectified and the student was duly certificated.

A few complaints were upheld in relation to late cancellation and rescheduling of courses or examinations, and poor notification concerning the changes. In all instances apologies were given and refunds provided. Procedures within the department have since been updated to ensure that students are informed more promptly of any significant amendments to courses, and that employers are also advised of the changes.

A couple of complaints arose due to time taken to mark assessments. In each case, there was agreement that feedback should have been provided sooner, and staff involved were reminded of the College procedure for Internal Assessment, which states that 'The Assessor will inform the candidate of the result of assessment as soon as possible, normally within ten working days'.

One student was unhappy with the teaching of a subject and consequently several changes were made, including support from a more experienced tutor, additional resources and student admission to labs during breaks.

One student did not feel that the classroom supplied was appropriate for the practical subject being taught, therefore the classroom was changed in time for the following lesson to one considered more appropriate.

## Services

One complaint was upheld in the Services category regarding delay in processing a refund. As a result, improvements were immediately implemented to ensure that future refund requests be treated as a matter of urgency. It is now standard practice that an alternative member of the finance team is copied into refund emails, to ensure intervention should the main contact be absent. In addition, an improved level of communication has been established to ensure the requester is kept informed of progress at all times.

## Facilities

A few complaints upheld in this category related to contractors working noisily on College grounds during unsociable hours. As a result, the Head of Estates now issues instructions to contractors regarding working only within regulated hours, and that those who contravene will have this taken into consideration when further contracts are being negotiated. One contractor was removed from the approved contractor list as a result of a repeat breach.

A couple of complaints were upheld as a result of poor reliability of the cash machine located in the Anniesland campus, as well as the lack of availability of contactless to pay for catering services. As a result of the ongoing issues with this particular cash machine, a replacement was installed. In addition, the College worked with the catering contractor to initiate the installation of chip and pin facilities.

A complaint was received from a student who was accidentally overcharged in the College canteen, and when it was established that an error had occurred, the complainant was quickly refunded and an apology was offered.

Another complainant was unhappy being stuck in a lift for over 20 minutes. The complainant was advised that the College are currently in the process of undertaking a major refurbishment programme to improve the long term reliability and efficiency of the lifts.

One complainant was unhappy that she was unable to park in a disabled bay due to the number of non-blue badge holders using the spaces. As a consequence, blue badge spaces are now more regularly monitored, offending vehicles stickered and those abusing the spaces reported.

## Other

All complaints upheld in the 'Other' category related to teaching staff industrial action and how it might impact upon student learning and preparedness to pass assessments. All complainants were reassured that the College would put in place suitable arrangements to support them during the period of industrial action, with libraries and other support facilities remaining open during the strike days. In addition, extensive support for students was arranged at the end of the final block to ensure that those who felt they had fallen behind were able to catch up.

## 4. Learning from Complaints

Complaint Reports are prepared Quarterly for publication on the College website and for review by Senior Management. In addition, the Annual Summary is reviewed by the Senior Management Team as well as being endorsed by the Board of Management.

Although there is some evidence that the existing reports generated assist in learning lessons, further analysis is required to identify themes both locally and at an organisational level. For academic year 2017-18 a monthly report will be initiated for ongoing review and action by Senior Management, to further improve learning from complaints.

## **5. Customer Satisfaction**

The College requests feedback from complainants on their satisfaction with the complaints process via a follow up survey, issued approximately 10 days after the final response has been sent. In 2016-17 there were 15 responses (9%) to surveys emailed, which is a considerable decrease on 33 feedback responses (22%) received in 2015-16.

From 15 responses received, only 33% of respondents were aware of the complaints procedure before making a complaint. That said, 100% found it easy to make their complaint. 67% felt that their complaint was thoroughly investigated and that the response received addressed the content of their complaint. Nearly every respondent was satisfied with the time taken to investigate their complaint and felt they were dealt with courteously at all times during the complaint process – 93% for both.

It is clear that raising awareness of the complaints handling procedure is a priority, and that there is still room for improvement in investigating and responding fully to complaints.

## **6. Conclusions**

### **Strengths**

- The College continues to employ a robust system for recording and monitoring complaints, which meets legislative and SPSO requirements.
- Complaints are quickly assigned by Complaints Handlers and where appropriate responses are scrutinised prior to issue.
- Response times for addressing complaints have gradually improved over the past three years and are now, on average, below SPSO requested timescales for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.
- In many instances, lessons are learned from complaints and there is some evidence of changes in processes arising from complaints.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- Complaint Handlers are still heavily relied upon to distribute reminders, sometimes several times to ensure that complaints are answered within required timescales.
- The standard of written complaint response varies greatly, therefore staff development and guidance is required to ensure that responses provided by Complaint Reviewers address all of the issues raised by complainants.
- Further efforts must be made to learn lessons from complaints both at local and College level.